

*Coming To “Know Thyself” at Juniata*  
*Juniata Commencement Address*

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**A**s a preface to my remarks, I have to get something off my chest. Back in 1961 all freshmen had to wear blue-and-gold beanies. I hated those hats. Once I threw mine away; I thought, “No more crazy hats for me.” Wrong. In order to graduate I had to wear the same weird getup as I am wearing today. What is it with Juniata and out-of-date apparel?

My first day as a freshman at Juniata was in August 1961. I was here for football training camp and scared out of my wits. I’m not even sure why I was anxious, but two incidents that day may explain some of it.

First, before I even had unpacked my gear, the Director of Development at Juniata came to my dorm and asked if I would be willing to meet the man who had set up the sports scholarship I had been given in the name of his late wife, Neva Miller. Naturally I said yes, so we drove downtown to Mr. Miller’s hardware store. We had pleasant introductions, and Mr. Miller asked me directly if Marzio was an Italian name. “Yes sir, it is.” “Are you Catholic?” he asked. “Well, sir, I was raised Catholic, but I have sort of drifted into a no-religion posture.”

“Oh,” was all he said. There was a long pause and then he continued, “You are lucky that you weren’t here when I attended Juniata. We didn’t have many Catholics except those big Polish football players from Pittsburgh at that time. And we made them room under the Bell Tower in Founders Hall.”

That was it. I thanked him profusely for the scholarship and for not making me sleep with bells ringing in my head.

I decided to walk back to campus after that meeting. Strolling up Mifflin Street, I was stunned by a bizarre sight that I have held clearly in my mind for the past forty-eight years!

Just ahead of me was a purple 1950 Hudson Commodore that resembled an inverted bathtub. The car was moving slowly – so slowly that I was gaining on it at a casual walking speed. But that wasn’t what was so bizarre. The driver was a tall, thin woman who gripped the steering wheel so tightly that I

thought she was going to crush it. The trunk lid was open and one end of the six two-by-four wood studs, each twelve feet long, was jammed inside. Ten feet away from the rear of the car was a man in his late fifties or early sixties who held the other end of the studs, three on each shoulder. This guy was sweating, exhausted and determined to hold up his end of the deal, literally. I decided to run up to him and help out, but just at that moment the purple Hudson turned left. For the car it was a tight arc, but for the poor man with the boards on his shoulders, it was a wide, swinging arc that required him to race at three times the speed just to stay even. After the turn, the car stopped. The man and woman had arrived home. I offered to help carry the studs into the backyard. They accepted and invited me to stay for iced tea. It turned out that this couple was Jane and Ken Crosby, and Dr. Crosby had been assigned to be my academic counselor. (I secretly wanted to ask them whether or not they had purchased the lumber from Mr. Miller).

Wow! Is this college in the middle of Pennsylvania weird or what?

The answer to that is simple. No, Juniata College is not weird. It has a better sense of itself than any other college or university I have encountered since my days here. Indeed, its curriculum continually morphs into different courses and combinations of disciplines, but its objective is the same as when I attended: to help us get a strong sense of who we are. “Know thyself” sounds so simple, but it is a demanding, complex command that requires all of our energy.

What did I learn here at Juniata College?

(1) No matter how smart or talented you think you are, there are a lot of people who are smarter, faster and stronger.

Hence: Humility is an essential value.

(2) Teamwork will trump Superman anytime. In sports this principle is obvious, but I saw it in the evolution of the *Great Epochs of World Cultures* courses that many of us worked on in the early 1960s. I saw it in the organization of the Civil Rights crusade, which Juniata and the Church of the Brethren helped to fuel. I think of the plays, the literary magazines, the scientific teams – on and on – that required a dedicated faculty and an energetic student body to create.

Hence: Teamwork helps you learn about yourself.

(3) Community service was not a required course, but nobody could spend four years on this beautiful campus without being awed by the power and beauty of philanthropy. Dr. and Mrs. Crosby may have carried their lumber themselves from the store to their home in order to

save delivery charges, but they were among the first to give hard-earned funds to charities dedicated to key social issues. I remember students helping prisoners in Lewistown learn to read; others worked with gangs in Chicago; there were food and clothing drives as well as foreign mission work. I saw some of the brightest students in America at Juniata go on to become superb doctors, lawyers and businessmen – students who could write their own ticket anywhere, but who preferred to return to their own towns and apply their genius to the communities they loved.

Hence: A belief in community is fundamental.

(4) Tolerance for people who on the surface seem different seemed to grow profoundly at Juniata in the 1960s. In my class of '65, one friend was Androniko Adede from Kenya. Andy, as we called him, was an elegant and well-spoken young man who was the first person I ever met who had never seen a baseball game. Of course, when baseball season came around, a group of us took Andy to watch Juniata play. We tried to explain the rules, objectives and strategies, but they didn't appear to sink into the mind of this very bright guy. When the game ended, we were convinced that we had failed completely. But someone asked him, "Andy, what did you think about the game?" This wise African simply observed, "Baseball is the only sport I know where the best game is when nothing happens."

It struck me as being a funny response, but later I thought about it. Here, Mr. Expert, Peter Marzio, was being taught a key lesson: *It all depends on your point of view.*

A second example of diversity was my first-semester roommate, a young man named Julian Tavellero. He came from New York City and he had one goal in life: to become a fireman. He was a talented football player who never studied. He lasted one semester, but no one who met him ever forgot the Prince (that is what he called himself).

Why was he in college? Good question. I think his parents wanted him to give it a shot. That word "shot" might be too close to the truth. Julian was a survivor of gangs in New York and he could do one thing better than anyone else in school: he could throw a knife with frightening accuracy. Every night at around 9 p.m., everyone in Cloister Hall would gather around our room for a "study break." Julian was the main attraction. He would take a dull butter knife from the cafeteria, stand at one end of the room, turn his back to the solid oak door that connected one room to another, bend over, and throw the knife through his legs at the door. I never saw him miss. Many of the young men in Cloister came from quiet, wholesome towns in Pennsylvania. They had never seen someone like Prince. The look in their eyes as the butter knife stuck into the door and vibrated fiercely enough to make a high-pitch sound was priceless.

I was reminded of Julian the next summer when I received a hefty bill from the Dean of Men for my share of the damages to the oak door. I also wondered what Mr. Miller would have done if Julian had been awarded the Neva Miller Scholarship.

Hence: Be open to others and defend diversity.

I don't want to say that humility, teamwork, community and diversity will help you win whatever challenge you face, but they will keep you in the game. Sometimes the odds will be too great. I remember in my junior year when Juniata was playing a very good football team at Susquehanna. Their coach was the son or grandson of Amos Alonzo Stagg, one of the greatest coaches in college football. The legend himself was on the Susquehanna bench.

We got creamed. They were bigger, faster and more talented. After the game the Susquehanna coach ran up to Fred Prender (Juniata's coach) and said, "Fred, your little guys played fantastically against us. We didn't expect such resistance." A dejected Prender looked up and said, "Well coach, your big guys beat the blankety-blank out of our little guys."

Yes, I would have been happier if we had won, but it was simply an honor to have been there.

Hence: Self-knowledge demands a realistic perspective.

And it is a profound honor for me to be here today. I know the economy is bleak. I wish I had a fool-proof formula for you to follow. The one positive is that this is also a time when great change is possible. The world is more malleable today than at any time since the end of World War II. Just think, if you apply the Juniata values of "know thyself" to your world, the possibilities are endless. Here's one person's example.

I found the range of intellectual experiences here to be my salvation. I declared history as my major, but I also accumulated a lot of credits in geology from Professor Trexler and in art history from the man who gave me the confidence to be myself, Professor Barbash. In graduate school at the University of Chicago, I got a scholarship to enroll in both the history and art history departments. And I am convinced that part of the reason things have gone well for me in Houston for the past twenty-seven years is my basic understanding of geology, especially as it relates to the oil industry.

Did I plan this? Absolutely not! Back in 1961 I was merely pleased to have avoided the bell tower.

Juniatians are realists. In the 1980s there was a TV program called *Hill Street Blues*, which always began with the police captain handing out assignments to the officers on the morning shift. His last words were always the same:

“Hey, let’s be careful out there.”

I will say that to you. Today you are graduating from a top-notch school. If you have made it through all the hurdles that this dynamic liberal arts institution sets up, then you can make it against the greatest odds. Just remember, few people have learned the Juniata values of know thyself. That is what the world will learn from you.

Thank you.